



THE CONCEPTS OF THE REAL & THE MAGICAL IN THE FANTASY LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Magic is the element that distinguishes the fantasy literature from other forms of literature. This element basically comprises of sorcery, witchcraft, imaginary creatures, super powers, and supernatural forces. The domains of the real and the magical overlap, cross and even defy each other. This tool has been devised to accomplish agendas such as bringing forth the folklore and fairy tales to the readers; or for introducing the dark themes such as the horrors of fascism or wars; or even for exploring religious or scientific ideas. Industry and technology can be represented through magic. It can take up well-known personalities of the real world and turn them into totally different creatures that we can recognize or relate to with some thought and study. Humanity and magic make a strong connection and the mental, emotional and social structures are explored as well as illustrated through magic.

KEYWORDS: Agendas, Creatures, Fantasy, Humanity, Industry, Magical, Real, Technology.

Fantasy recombines and inverts the real, but does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real,' world. (Jackson, 20)

Fantasy is a play of the real and the magical or the unreal. It cannot exist in a vacuum. Humans have always been fascinated by the idea of the magical and hence have devised card tricks, parlour tricks, hypnotism, etc. to get a taste of the fantastic. This element of magic springs up from the real world, but takes a flight and goes much beyond. A boundary separates the domain of the real, and the domain of the fantastic. One is based in the familiar setting, whereas the other is defamiliarized. The reader's indecision between these universes offers a way from one to the next. If the reader does not participate, the fantastic element is lost. Magic is the play with the reader's mind. It is the imagination of the reader that turns fantasy into real. The Unicorn in Peter S. Beagle's novel, *The Last Unicorn*, says to a malicious witch,

Real magic can never be made by offering up someone else's liver. You must tear out your own and not expect to get it back. (Beagle, 32)

Each author deciphers magic in an unexpected way; however, all establish some association with this present reality, or in any event, an association with a well-known, human idea for example logical law, Science, sacrifice, universal facts, secrets, etc. The real world is altered, inverted, distorted to convert it into the world of magic. C.S. Lewis in *The Magician's Nephew* alleges that the most powerful magic is "the secret of secrets," (Lewis, 70).

The authors of Fantasy Literature have brought forth several concepts or ideas and personified them into characters or depicted them through events. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis introduces Christ's life, demise, and resurrection profoundly through the character of Aslan, the Lion. Tolkien's connection back to reality was shaped in a post-World War wish for nostalgia, back to the occasions when the world was not assaulted by war and loss. His scenario of the Middle-Earth undergoes a significant change, as antiquated, enchanted races blur, and men make their mark as a politically influential nation. While harmony is gained in the long run, it does not come easy: the rule of man guarantees the loss of the enchanted world, and the introduction of industry and the subsequent war.

The magic of Tolkien and Lewis acts in various ways. Characters such as hobbits, monster lions, dominating witches, dragons, magicians and walking trees facilitate and increase the awe and fascination of the world of fantasy. Yet, these authors had a purpose in mind. They demonstrated issues of reality through their stories and enchantment.

Lewis acquainted the kids with Christianity in a manner that had never been done before through allegorical representation. Lewis stringently attaches himself to the Christian myth of world creation, only one monotheistic experience. As Wood points out, Lewis' idea "leads him to use the Christian myth as a closure on human existence," (Wood). Lewis himself confesses his aim in penning down *The Chronicles of Narnia*, wherein he mentions that the genre of a fairy tale could

steal past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood . . . supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could (Lewis).

Tolkien manifested the demise of magic and innocence in his characters and situations. He introduced his themes to a world that had not yet recovered from the aftermath of the World Wars. Tolkien's magic is mixed with time and races. The ancient races portrayed in his works include the non-human ones too like those of the elves and the wizards. He also depicts the fairies as "Light-elves and the Deep-elves and the Sea-elves," (Tolkien, 164), who "invented their magic and their cunning craft," (Tolkien, 164). All these creatures have magic inherent to them, something that is synonymous with their existence. Magic has remained with them, as they have not travelled to the "Wide World," (Tolkien, 164), i.e. to the rest of Middle-Earth.

The other races that are a part of Tolkien's world are also controlled by the laws of magic, though they themselves cannot control magic. This is seen in *The Hobbit* during the incident of the capturing of Bilbo and the dwarves by the three trolls. At dawn, the trolls get converted into stone because it is an accepted fact that "trolls . . . must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of," (Tolkien, 52).

In spite of the control of magic over the land and its creatures, the magic begins to fade away with the flourishing of man. The ancient races lose their dominance as man gains power. Hinlicky says,

The fulcrum of power in Middle Earth is shifting. It is no longer in the moral certainties and magical assurances of ages past. Now it is in the morally ambiguous governance of men, who shortly will take center stage in the unfolding drama of the planet. The Elves leave for the Grey Havens of their own volition, but the hobbits will be marginalized, the dwarves swallowed up by the earth, and even Tom Bombadil will be seen no more. (Hinlicky).

A wizard named Gandalf the Grey in *The Lord of the Rings* reminds us of Lewis' Aslan. As Aslan represents Jesus Christ, so does Gandalf represent Merlin, the man of mystery and magic in the Arthurian legend. Gandalf deals in the creating and manipulating of light and fire. He "made a special study of bewitchments with fire and light," (Tolkien, 100), and in battle, fights others with "bright blue fire," (Tolkien, 107). It is further demonstrated in *The Fellowship of the Ring* that Gandalf steer light in the opposite direction too to suit his purpose. In his encounter with Bilbo, "he seemed to grow taller and menacing; his shadow filled the little room," (Tolkien, 56).

However, Gandalf's association with the natural world is portrayed in his ability to hold conversations with and interpret the language of various animals. He is a friend of the Great Eagles and often talks to them. He can comprehend the "dreadful language of the Wargs," (Tolkien, 105). In addition to his knack with light and fire, he is closely united with the elemental and the environment.

Though Gandalf has magical abilities, he uses them with great discretion. He refrains from the use of magic because

when the magic goes, human beings will be thrown back on their own natural resources. As a teacher of those who have no magical powers, Gandalf demonstrates in word and deed how to overcome the enemy without magic. To do otherwise would be to teach them what they cannot possibly learn (Riga).

Thus, Gandalf also symbolizes the loss of magic as the price of development. Magic becomes powerless in confrontation with the siege engines of Saruman, and the iron and steel of man. Technology can do much more than what magic can. Man has cultivated his own magic i.e. technology. However, there is a sharp contrast between the old magic and the new one; as the former worked in harmony with Nature, whereas the latter governs and exploits it for its own needs. This phenomenon marks the segregation of man with Nature and Earth.

In exploring magic in *The Lord of the Rings*, we must allude to the One Ring that is the load, the onus that Frodo has to transport across Middle-Earth and also annihilate. This Ring is the epitome of the magic of control and even the bearer has to endure pain for just carrying it. It embodies the monstrosity unleashed by wars and authoritarian governments.

Thus, it can be observed that both Lewis and Tolkien use magic to accomplish modern agendas. Magic is instrumental in protecting and sending further the cause of the larger good. The inexhaustible use of magic with folklore as its origin and background can be observed in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series too.

Rowling sprung to fame with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* released in 1997. Her use of folklore is due to her immense fascination with folk material starting with Greek mythology to homeopathic medicines and to all the belief systems rampant round the world. She herself claimed this in a press conference:

I love freakish names and I have always been interested in folklore and I think it was a logical thing for me to end up writing even though it came so suddenly (ITV 2005).

This cultural and folklore material is what goes into creating Rowling's world of fantasy and magic. The understanding of the cultural element enables the readers to establish connections with their own real world.

In his influential essay entitled "On Fairy-Stories", J.R.R. Tolkien presents the terms "Primary World" and "Secondary World" to differentiate between the real world and the fantasy world:

the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. (132)

Rowling inserts her Secondary World into the Primary World in her Harry Potter series. Like in the real world, the rituals form an important section of the fantasy world too. Hogwarts is the school of witchcraft and wizardry and the first step to seeking entry here is a letter of acceptance sent by the school. Letters are delivered exclusively to children who have magical abilities and are approaching the age of eleven. If a child does not receive the letter around this age, they would never do so in future. This sending and receiving of the acceptance letter is the first ritual into the world of magic.

Like in our regular academics, in Hogwarts too tests conducted to evaluate the progress of the students. The Ordinary Wizarding Level (O.W.L.) and the Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Test (N.E.W.T.) are such examples. The Sorting Hat ceremony is another ritual of Hogwarts.

Rowling keeps utilizing the knowledge and belief systems of the real world to create a world of fantasy, a world that the readers can imagine as well as relate to as something that is their own. Though magic demarcates the boundaries between the wizarding and Muggle worlds, both worlds are interlinked using the cultural as well as scientific expressions. Herbology is a class; students are enrolled in. This resembles our botany or plant science and aims at the identification, growing as well as utilizing of plants for magical purposes. Harry (in *The Chamber of Secrets*) studies about the Mandrake root that is shaped like a human and is

a powerful restorative [...] used to return people who have been transfigured or cursed to their original state (Rowling 1998:92).

Rowling's world in the *Harry Potter* series as well as in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* is inhabited by fantastical creatures like elves, goblins, trolls, giants, dementors, threestals, skrewts, etc. These creatures appear to be inventions or figments of imagination on the part of the author. They, however, have their basis in the folklore or are tools to present social problems such as racism or medical stigma.

Legend narratives find a way into Rowling's works and help to build her plots as well as structure. Rowling's *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, which are mentioned and discussed in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* are a collection of fairy tales penned down by Rowling and share affinity with *marchen* that is easily identified by the reader. These tales are indicative of structural and thematic references to the *marchen tales*. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione Granger reads a story from *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* about three brothers who are able to outsmart death. This tale is not entirely new but holds a mirror to many

European folk tales that personify Death and portray human beings who can escape Death using their exceptional intelligence.

Hence, Rowling creates a universe that is separate from, yet can co-exist with the Primary World of the readers. She designs happenings, characters and events that seem imaginary but on close speculation can be traced to folklore, legends or actual world. These aspects of her works are significant as they have a role to play in our problems and solutions.

The discussion of magic in fantasy literature would remain incomplete without a reference to *A Game of Thrones* that the author George R R Martin has infused with magic. Martin has pronounced that he has faith in "judicious use of magic" in epic fantasy. Effective magic has to be, according to the writer, "unknowable and strange and dangerous with forces that can't be predicted or controlled." He also says:

I wanted to keep the magic in my book subtle and keep our sense of it growing, and it stops being magical if you see too much of it.

The work is full of magic and the game of thrones would fall apart if we cannot relate its characters, events and power game with the game of magic. The question to be asked for *A Game of Thrones* is not who has magic; but who does not have magic? And it, of course, is rhetorical. The characters are empowered by different kinds of magic. And so many of the characters are themselves magical, or even supernatural. Whether it be spells, super powers, blood magic, hypnotism, shape shifting, or inhabiting bodies of other creatures, the work has it all. The seven kingdoms are the kingdoms that run on the management of magic.

If we begin at the beginning, the earliest occupants of the Westeros are Leaf and her fellow children, living in the forest. In their efforts in invading humans, they co-incidentally create creatures called the White Walkers. They also fail to command these new creatures. These dwellers have the power to hurl fireballs. Coming to the Night King, his body is formed of ice. And he can even bring the dead back to life! We also have a group of assassins. They have come together as a religious cult and call themselves the Faceless Men. They idolize and are dedicated to the Many-faced God. They have their own belief systems in which they license themselves to murder people, though it is just a pretext for mercenary motives. They cut off and preserve the faces of their victims and transform themselves into the latter by wearing those faces.

A character with conspicuous powers of magic is Melisandre. She gives birth to a shadow baby or a demon baby who kills Renly Baratheon. She owns an enchanted necklace that confers youth upon her and enables her to seduce anyone and everyone. But she also takes the credit for bringing Jon Snow back to life. And coming to Jon Snow, he too isn't bereaved of magical powers and skills. The Stark kids are endowed with a special power to 'warg' or psychologically reside into their direwolves. This makes Jon Snow too capable of inhabiting Ghost, his direwolf.

Thoros of Myr is skilled in magic too that becomes apparent in his resurrecting of Lord Beric Dondarrion many times. With blood magic, he can set his sword on fire. He has also bestowed magical powers on Beric. How can we forget about the three-eyed raven while talking of the rampant magic in this magical work? This raven takes Brandon Stark on an expedition through time. Bran himself is miraculous in his time traveling capabilities. He too can warg into animals.

We then have the Qartheen who conceals his face behind a mask. She hallucinates people to capture and use them. She does this to Daenerys Targaryen and her dragons too to exploit their magic to make herself more powerful. She, however, forgets the fire producing capacity of the dragons and the latter turn her into ashes. Daenerys Targaryen herself is a very impressive woman whom fire cannot burn. She is called the mother of dragons as dragons obey and are loyal to this lovely, powerful lady.

Mirri Maz Duur is the lady who used blood magic to resurrect Khal Drogo, though all she can bring back is a zombie. It is interpreted that she did this deliberately to avenge the slavery of her people. Jojen Reed is the figure that possesses greensight, indicating the power of prophetic dreams. He can see the present day as well as the past and the present in his visions. He is the one, who before his death, trains Bran to avail the potential of his sight.

A minor character, but one who raises the hair of the readers is Maggy the Frog. She foretells that Cersei would have three children All of them would be blonde and would be crowned too. But it is then that all would die. In this long list of magical characters also come the Pyromancers who are alchemists and can create green hazardous substance that explodes; but they can also generate wildfire. We have the magic surgeon named Qyburn. He stitched the dead mutilated body of Sir Gregor Clegane and granted life back to him.

All these characters and all this magic perpetrated and practiced by them brings forth an intricate game and theme of power and gender politics that goes beyond the magical and makes the series a seminal work of fantasy literature and power politics.

Thus, magic has been not just magic but a delineation of religious, cultural, social, political and scientific themes. It has been made instrumental by writers in driving home their point; even an attempt at being whistle blowers to reform the society and people. Magical creatures bond with human ones to create a better humanity, a better world, not just in fantasy, but in reality.

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